

Seattle rewards good building science and punishes shortcuts. Our marine climate cycles between long rains, intermittent sun breaks, and cool nights that condense moisture inside wall assemblies. If water sneaks behind siding, decay fungi wake up and start digesting the cellulose in framing and trim. The damage often hides for years. By the time you notice a soft spot in a window sill, the sheathing behind it may crumble like wet cardboard. Dry rot repair in Seattle is less about patching a blemish and more about finding and eliminating the leak pathway that allowed it to form in the first place.

## **What dry rot really is, and why Seattle sees so much of it**

The term “dry rot” confuses people. The fungi that cause it need moisture. They thrive when wood hovers above 20 percent moisture content for extended periods, often due to repeated wetting and slow drying. Seattle’s climate supplies steady humidity and frequent wind-driven rain, especially on west and south elevations. When siding lacks a proper drainage plane, or when flashing is missing at trim interfaces, water reaches wood-based sheathing and framing. Once fungal hyphae colonize, they weaken lignin, the glue that holds wood fibers together. The result feels spongy under a screwdriver and snaps in brittle wafers when fully decayed.

Vinyl and fiber cement siding are not the culprits by themselves. The failures usually trace back to details: reverse-lapped housewrap at a window, no kickout flashing at a roof-to-wall intersection, overdriven nails that perforate flashing tape, or clogged weep paths at trim. In older Seattle neighborhoods, cedar siding can last decades if it breathes and sheds water. But any system, old or new, will fail if water is trapped and cannot exit.

## **Early clues most homeowners miss**

A reliable dry rot repair contractor spends as much time reading subtle signs as swinging a pry bar. You can catch problems earlier if you know what to look for. Wide paint cracks around exterior trim, a swollen lower corner of a window casing, or caulk lines that separate after every winter are yellow flags. Discolored sheathing visible at gaps in lap siding or a lingering musty smell near a baseboard often points to trapped moisture. On sunny days, watch for “ghosting” outlines of studs telegraphing through painted siding, which sometimes hints at differential drying and wet sheathing. Inside the house, a wavy baseboard beneath a window suggests the sill pan is either nonexistent or overwhelmed.

I have opened walls that looked fine from the street, only to find finger-jointed trim feeding water behind a brickmold, soaking OSB sheathing. The paint still shined, but a screwdriver pushed clean through. The homeowners thought they had a minor Seattle trim repair job. They needed a surgical partial re-side, new window flashing, and updated kickouts to stop a recurring leak that had been quietly active since the last remodel.

## **How hidden leaks form behind siding**

Tracing water is part physics, part detective work. Seattle’s wind drives rain laterally into joints. Capillary action pulls that water uphill under horizontal laps and into nail penetrations. If there is no dedicated drainage gap, surface tension holds water where you do not want it. Building codes have recognized this and now require a water-resistive barrier and flashing that shingle laps correctly. Still, older homes and rushed renovations often lack a continuous strategy.

Common offenders include head flashings that do not extend past trim, creating backflow behind casings; deck ledgers bolted directly through siding without proper flashing, which channels water into the rim; and roof step flashing installed under trim but without a kickout to push runoff into gutters. Wherever roofing intersects a wall, I expect to find at least a stain line. If the siding sits tight to the shingles with no clearance, the lower courses stay saturated for months. Over time, the sheathing decays and fasteners lose bite, making the wall feel loose in a wind.

## **The anatomy of a good Seattle dry rot inspection**

A Seattle dry rot inspection should proceed from the obvious to the hidden, using minimal invasiveness first, then opening up only where the evidence points. Thermal imaging finds cold, damp areas on a dry day. A quality moisture meter, pin type and pinless, tells you whether the siding and sheathing are cycling above safe levels. Probes at known risk areas around windows and roof-to-wall junctions give numeric readings. Sounding with a plastic mallet can reveal hollow zones where the sheathing no longer bears against studs.

When numbers spike or the wall sounds suspect, we remove a small section of trim or a course of siding to confirm the condition of the WRB and the underlying wood. Good siding contractors in Seattle document each opening, then protect it immediately. If the decay is local, we can limit the scope. If we find fungal strands bridging across cavities or a wide swath of punky sheathing, we step back and reassess the wall’s entire water management strategy.

# Choosing the right contractor for the problem you have

Not every siding company is equipped for forensic repair. Some excel at new cladding over sound substrates. For hidden leak investigations and surgical rebuilds, you want siding contractors in Seattle who can diagnose, not just replace. Ask how they test moisture, what they do to trace water paths, and whether they will re-create proper flashing details using ASTM and manufacturer guidance. Listen for specific terms: pan flashing with back dam, positive slope sill, rainscreen gap, kickout flashing, head flashing with end dams, and shingle-lapped WRB. A firm that offers siding repair Seattle wide should be comfortable opening walls and matching original trim profiles, not just pitching full replacement.

For homeowners, the choice often lands between targeted house trim repair and a broader siding replacement. A seasoned dry rot repair contractor should be candid about the risks of doing the minimum. Sometimes you can replace a rotten lower skirt board and correct a flashing error above it, then monitor. Other times, partial work just hides a system failure that will resurface in a year. I have recommended full siding replacement services Seattle WA for homes where the sheathing had widespread mold and decay, even though only two windows showed distress from the outside. The cost is higher, but so is the certainty that the building envelope will finally perform.

## Materials and details that hold up in Seattle weather

There is no single best siding for our climate. Each system has rules.

Cedar looks right on older Seattle houses, but it needs a ventilated rainscreen and meticulous flashing. Back-priming and sealing end cuts helps, yet those steps only slow wetting. The rainscreen gap, usually a 3 to 6 millimeter space achieved with furring strips or a drainage mat, is what keeps cedar happy. It allows pressure equalization during wind gusts and gives water a channel to escape.

Fiber cement behaves well when kept off roofs and hardscapes by the clearances the manufacturer specifies. The material itself resists rot, but the sheathing behind it does not. I see early failures where installers skip flashing at horizontal trim bands or caulk butt joints instead of using slip sheets and flashing, which trap water instead of shedding it.

Engineered wood sidings can work if every cut is sealed and the rainscreen is continuous. OSB-based panels cannot tolerate chronic wetting at edges. When homeowners want that look, I make a case for generous overhangs and strict joint detailing, otherwise we end up doing exterior trim repair within a few seasons.

Vinyl is forgiving in rain because it is inherently vented, but it depends entirely on the WRB and the flashing beneath. Any window installed without a real sill pan will leak into the wall, vinyl or not. With vinyl, I insist on high-quality housewrap tapes, properly rolled, and a track record of maintaining a drainage path at all openings.

For trim, PVC and fiber cement trims resist decay, but transitions matter. Where PVC meets fiber cement, heater expansion and contraction can open gaps if not accounted for with appropriate fasteners and joint treatment. Wood trims still have a place when selected and detailed correctly. The trick is keeping them out of splash zones and off horizontal planes where water sits.

## Repairing the damage is only half the job

It is tempting to chase every visible soft spot, cut it out, and patch. If the leak persists, the new wood becomes sacrificial. A smart dry rot repair Seattle project begins with source control. We trace the pathway that delivered water into the assembly, then craft a repair that blocks and drains that path. This often means pulling the surrounding trim and a few courses of siding to install missing components.

Window sills deserve special attention. A proper sill pan is not a strip of flashing tape alone. It needs a back dam to stop water from rolling into the interior, side dams that rise at least up the jamb height, and a sloped base that directs water out. The head flashing above should extend past the jambs and include end dams so water cannot curl back behind the casing. At roof-to-wall intersections, kickout flashings must be rigid, properly angled, and integrated with both the roofing and the WRB, not tacked on after the fact.

When reconstructing affected areas, we treat the assembly as a system. The WRB must shingle over lower components, not the other way around. Tapes need firm pressure and clean, dry substrates. Fasteners should hit studs, not float in decayed sheathing. Where the sheathing is compromised, we remove it back to sound wood and replace it in full sheets, then tie in with blocking so the repair does not introduce new weak points. If framing members have lost more than about a third of their section, we sister or replace them. Anything gray, stringy, and brittle under light probing is not worth saving.

# A practical sequence for homeowners facing suspected rot

- Confirm the symptoms: look for swelling at window corners, peeling paint at lower trim, musty odors, and soft spots under light pressure. Note wind-driven rain exposure.
- Call for a Seattle dry rot inspection from a contractor who performs invasive testing when warranted. Ask for moisture meter readings and photos.
- Approve targeted exploratory openings at the highest-risk detail, not everywhere at once. Decide scope based on findings, not guesses.
- Fix the leak pathway first: correct flashing, add a rainscreen gap if none exists, install kickouts, and adjust clearances to manufacturer specs.
- Rebuild with durable materials and proper integration, then plan ongoing monitoring during the next rainy season.

That five-step path reduces surprises and keeps costs aligned with actual conditions. It also preserves more of your existing siding when full replacement is not necessary.

## Real numbers and timelines

Homeowners often ask how long dry rot repair takes and what it costs. Scope drives both. A localized corner repair at one window with minor trim replacement and proper pan flashing might run a few thousand dollars and take two to three days, including drying time after rain. Opening a wall from ledger to roof eave, replacing sheathing, adding a rainscreen, and re-trimming can push into multi-week territory, especially if weather stalls progress. Full siding replacement on a typical two-story Seattle house, with upgraded flashing and rainscreen, commonly lands in the mid five figures to low six figures depending on material and trim complexity.

Moisture dictates scheduling. We do not seal in wet wood. Sometimes that means heat and airflow for a day or two after exposure, with moisture readings taken before closing. An honest contractor will show you those readings and will not rush to trap moisture that will feed new decay.

## Permits, codes, and manufacturer specs

Seattle's permitting thresholds evolve, but structural repairs and siding replacement over defined square footage generally require permits. When work touches shear walls, we review nailing schedules and panel thickness to keep the house within seismic design intent. That matters here. For warranty and performance, we follow manufacturer instructions to the letter. This includes clearances above roofs and paving, end-seal requirements for engineered products, and specific flashing details. Inspectors in Seattle look closely at window flashing and kickouts because they [Continue reading](#) see the failure patterns too.

## Where trim work fits into the bigger picture

Exterior trim repair often opens the window to the real problem. If a lower brickmold crumbles, replacing it without addressing the absent sill pan guarantees a repeat. House trim repair is a craft, matching profiles and paint lines, but it is also a water management exercise. I like to preassemble PVC or fiber cement trim details with kerfed drips and hidden flashings that secretly do the heavy lifting. Back caulking is not a strategy. Caulk fails where the joint moves and, at best, buys time. When a Seattle trim repair looks brand new and stays dry for years, it is because the hidden components are carrying the load, not the sealant.

## Rainscreens and ventilation: the overlooked insurance policy

The rainscreen category deserves emphasis. In the Pacific Northwest, a modest gap behind siding drastically improves drying potential. I have opened walls with rainscreens after a storm and found the sheathing damp to the touch yet structurally sound, with air movement clearing moisture within days. Immediately next door, a wall without the gap shows blackened OSB and fungal etching. The difference is that simple. For homeowners considering siding replacement services Seattle WA, ask for a ventilated rainscreen with bug screen at the base and top. It is not flashy, but it is the detail that separates resilient assemblies from recurring repair jobs.

## Case snapshots from the field

A Tudor in Ballard with stucco-look fiber cement struggled with repeated paint failures at the lower courses. Moisture readings hovered at 22 to 25 percent after heavy rain. We discovered roof kickouts missing at two dormer transitions. Water raced down the step flashing and behind the siding. After installing rigid kickouts, opening and replacing a four-foot swath of sheathing, and adding a rainscreen batten at the trouble elevation, moisture dropped under 15 percent even in December. No new paint failure since.

A Craftsman in Ravenna had elegant cedar siding and original fir trim. The homeowner hired a painter who caulked every shadowline tight, including the lower edge of the window casings to the siding. That seal trapped water at the head flashing termination. We removed the caulk, rebuilt two sills with properly sloped pans and back dams, and reintroduced a small kerf drip in the bottom trim. The old wood remains in place, protected by details that let it dry.

A West Seattle townhouse row developed leaks at balcony ledgers. Builders had lagged ledgers through fiber cement with no flashing, relying on sealant washers. Behind the ledger, the sheathing disintegrated. We removed the ledgers, installed continuous metal flashing with end dams, repaired sheathing and framing, and reinstalled with stand-off brackets to vent behind the beam. That small ventilation space and proper metal work eliminated chronic wetting and kept the new finish intact.

## **When a patch is enough and when to start over**

Judgment matters. If decay is confined to a single vulnerable detail, and the cause is obvious and correctable, a patch plus corrected flashing can be durable. I think of this as a controlled repair with monitoring. But if multiple elevations show symptoms, or if we find decay in sheathing across panel seams or at several windows on one wall, piecemeal work becomes false economy. Full replacement allows consistent WRB integration, continuous rainscreen installation, and quality control across the entire plane. For some homeowners, the decision hinges on budget. In those cases, we prioritize the worst elevation, usually the one taking the brunt of wind-driven rain, then plan subsequent phases as funds allow.

## **Working with the weather without losing momentum**

Seattle's weather is not an excuse to leave homes open. Good crews stage material, temporary protection, and heat to keep repairs moving. We use peel-and-stick membranes that adhere in cool temperatures, but not to wet surfaces, so prep is key. Temporary WRB patches get taped and shingle-lapped even for overnight protection. If rain threatens, we do not start openings we cannot secure by day's end. Homeowners appreciate that rhythm, and the building does too.

## **Maintenance prevents the next repair**

Even perfect details need light care. Keep gutters clear, especially at roof-to-wall intersections near kickouts. Maintain paint and sealant, but never caulk drainage paths or weep gaps. Trim vegetation away to let siding breathe. After big storms, walk the exterior and look at the usual suspects: lower trim corners, deck ledger areas, roof transition points. A 10-minute check can catch a problem before it rots your weekend.

## **Bringing it all together**

Dry rot repair in Seattle is not a cosmetic service. It is forensic building science with a finish carpenter's touch. The goal is not simply to restore what rotted, but to reengineer the path water takes so it never lingers where wood lives. Whether you need targeted trim and siding repair or a full re-side, the most valuable quality a contractor brings is a disciplined process. Diagnose the leak, expose just enough to see the truth, correct the water management details, rebuild with durable materials, and verify with moisture readings as the weather tests the work.

If you are calling around to siding contractors Seattle WA homeowners recommend, listen for that process. Ask about rainscreens, pan flashings with back dams, and kickouts. Request a Seattle dry rot inspection that uses tools and judgment, not guesswork. A firm that treats your exterior like a system will deliver repairs that last. The rain will keep coming. Your house should be ready for it.

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